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The Selection, Discipline, Training and Placing of Workers

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IN the following words on the selection, discipline, training and placing of workers, I shall deal in generalities to a great extent, as I believe we have all gone too far into details in our consideration of the handling of workers in industry.

It is now the style to deal in nicely differentiated classifications on all subjects. We talk very scientifically in parlors and pulpits nowadays, and many of us have no hesitation in wandering long distances either way from the decimal point. We must try not to get too far to the east of the decimal point with our first significant figure when we are operating in the human equation.

My slight experience leads me to believe in simple ways and manners in dealing with men and women of all social grades, and I find that the workers are not at all different from "home folks" if we treat them as such.

We workers must find ways to get into closer human touch with one another. The wonderful benefits of education are being more and more widely spread, and now is the time for all to try to work out good clean and happy solutions of the many remaining perplexing industrial problems inherited from the past. All of the harmful barriers of convention and precedent that now keep many of our fellow-workers from the enjoyment of good happy lives in this land of plenty must be torn down.

Industry, as our civilization knows it, must invariably have three partners in its firm: money, brains and brawn. The fruits or profits of industry will be fairly divided and paid back to the three partners as soon as we, in our seemingly stupid awkwardness, learn how it may be done. Those who have the good fortune and great privilege to be guiding the industries of this

country, must see it as a human problem which can be well and happily solved if it be treated simply and sympathetically.

Let us acknowledge that as the run of mind of us can scarcely handle mathematical problems of three variables, we probably cannot settle the human problem of a thousand variables with numbers and slide rules and long words. Let us try common sense methods and we shall not fail if we keep our ideals high. Let us try to help all of the partners in industry to learn and to understand the simple rules of economics which bound the domain of industry, and outside of which industry and its three partners cannot live.

In the greater number of industries, especially in plants working less than one thousand men, the finding of good workers is by the hit and miss method. Usually it is only the larger organizations that can afford to maintain special departments systematically to select workers. In many of the larger industrial plants the processes of selection, being inherently wrong, fade rapidly to low stages of lethargic efficiency, soon after being launched by the enthusiastic scheme inventor. Usually they are then re-vitalized, or should I say re-systematized, by red tape artists. These gentlemen traffic in complicated curves, weird rating scales and elaborate multicolored forms which when brought down to earth often amount to little more than very indirect methods of card cataloging.

The functionment of human beings is very complex, and probably can never be even reasonably well understood by cold calculators. The best selection method from all standpoints is to let the applicants for work "sell themselves" by direct personal appeal to the foreman under whom they are to work. Let him take them on trial. A well trained, responsible foreman will keep the ones he wants and will know how to direct the others into the arms of one of his fellow-foremen, or out through the front gate of the plant, as may be best for all concerned.

Let the applicant select his own job; show him a simple card with big print outline description of the work done in each department; help him to choose; tell him what a fine man the foreman is (don't have a foreman who is not a fine man).

When the applicant decides, tell him which fifteen minutes of the morning and afternoon each day his chosen foreman devotes

to hiring new men, and give him an appointment card which will get him into the shop with a boy guide right to the foreman's desk. Leave it to the foreman—you have to in the last analysis.

The proper object of each department or sub-department in a shop is to do its part of the whole work as well and as economically as possible.

It is a very simple thing to keep cost accounts and statistical data which will show the group efficiency of the workers under any foreman. Show your foremen these data and praise them for their able selection of workers. Let the foremen help each other by giving and taking workers from one another when necessary.

Issue a neat booklet describing the town in which the plant is located. Tell about the shop and its output and give the names of all foremen, inviting competent workmen to call or write—they will. Encourage men in the works to send these booklets to their friends. Offer through advertisements in city papers to send the booklets to any address.

In a word, select your workers by the ordinary common sense method of clean cut, personal contact between the man who will rank next above the applicant and the applicant himself.

The best way to maintain discipline in industrial plants varies as to details with the grades of intelligence encountered. In general it calls for the fixing of a few simple, reasonable rules of conduct, and the development of a sense of self-respect in the workers.

In any group of men there are a few who stand out above the others in the matter of dignity and self-respect. The other men are usually just as willing and ready to abide within the limits of fair and reasonable rules of conduct, but have not had the benefits of as good home training, and so are superficially unruly. They must be guided, and will almost always willingly follow the better man's lead.

A plan which I recommend is the appointment in the factory of, originally, about five per cent of the personnel with the rating "*First Class Workers.*" These men should be selected for their competency, dignity and self-respect, and should be chosen from all departments of office and works. They should include the works executives and officials. Once established they should

elect new members to their rating by vote, each department group electing its own additions. The First Class Workers should be encouraged to keep their standards high, but at the same time to elect as many members to the rating as possible.

These men should have special duties and prerogatives, such as countersigning passes to the works after hours, admittance as "audience" to foremen's technical conferences, meeting distinguished visitors to the plant, being deputized by their foreman in matters of department trust and responsibility, consulted as to plans and specifications for new machinery and facilities, etc., etc.

There should not be an officious interference of one class of workers with the functions of another class. Let the treasurer run his check books, the screw machine operator his automatics, the directors their business affairs, and the fireman his boilers. Don't try to run business like the army in Hayti—all generals—it may work as a matter of gold lace display on the parade ground, but it won't work in the Battle of Bread and Butter.

Questions of discipline should be referred to the standard of the First Class Workers' conduct for appraisal.

The training and placing of workers is also more or less of an individual problem with each industrial organization, and must be considered with intelligence and common sense.

Training in the shop means simply letting the young worker actually experience by doing with his hands and head all of the operations in his department. The already expert, experienced workers (excepting the jealous gourches) are the best teachers and will help the young new-comer if there is a real demand for new-comers. Show him why there is such a demand.

Young people learn readily, and those who are ever going to develop in a given line show satisfactory evidences to a competent foreman at once. Don't keep a failure on any work—it's hurtful to him. Have your foreman induce the young men workers to study after hours. The difference between twenty dollars and forty dollars a week to many a man was found in three sessions a week at night school for a year or two.

Young men in the mechanical industries can be readily induced to attend night schools. The night school work of all young men in any given department should be followed by the foreman of the department just as an intelligent father would follow his son's

work; and for the same reason, let it be known,—with a kindly, sympathetic interest, looking forward to the advancement of the young men through the department and as far beyond in the work world as the boys can go.

It may be said that some labor will not respond to such kindly interest and surveillance—I have yet to meet that kind of man. Naturally if industries try to handle such matters through cold outsiders, not a part of the workers' working fraternity, they will succeed about as well as the proverbial over-busy business man who tries to love his family by machinery (automobiles, yachts and lap dogs)—it can't be done.

The immediate ranking superior of any worker should be his mentor and guide as far as may be, and should in such capacity represent the executives who in turn are the stewards of the owners, the stockholders. This spirit if properly and *honestly* developed will produce wonderful results; it is simple and as old as the hills.

Training older men in the shop is very difficult, due, often, to their false pride and insistence on their own personal ideas and methods. Patience, intelligence and time must be the tools of the foreman in this job, and he will go far if he follows the Telephone Company's advice and keeps a smile in his voice.

The out of shop training of the older workers is also not so easy as with younger men. The older men have their family affairs after hours and are also more likely to be fatigued by the day's work. It would be profitable, I am sure, for most industries to try to develop these workers a little past the point to which their ordinary day's work carries them—and here again I would urge doing it in the name of the foreman or superintendent.

For example, a moving picture exhibition on the foundry floor after hours, to which all the foundry men and their wives are invited, will show them "how other plants do it." Funny films make a holiday performance of it. Have the best talker of the sales force on the "platform" and let him sell the plant output back to the men who made it. Let the metallurgist explain some of his micrographs and be prepared to answer embarrassing questions. Have some sort of a "community meet" for each group once or twice a month, and as far as possible mix fun with the instruction, and include the wives of the men once in a while.

At all contacts between workers keep the simple, fundamental facts of economics in the forefront. There are myriads of people who believe purses may be and are made of sows' ears—and that the secret of that highly lucrative performance is being hidden from them. Intelligent, trained workers will greatly help the less fortunate ones to see the real ins and outs of such purse making.

Ambitious workers usually "place" themselves. The good ones among the less ambitious must be helped and encouraged to go up. Some men are too modest to suggest that they be promoted to better jobs, and others are afraid of the jealous opinions of their fellows. They must be tactfully sorted out, and no man should be allowed to work much below his maximum mental capacity.

This sorting generally calls for the action of the foreman at least two grades above the worker. The immediate foreman naturally wants to keep his best men, both because of the workers' efficiency and because of his friendship and familiarity with the men. A tactful superintendent who knows how to appreciate and praise his foreman for developing such good workers has only to say the word in most cases of this kind.

It seems to be impracticable to go far with record systems in placing workers, especially in shifting men in the organization. Certain simple control records of workers should be kept principally for their protection against jealousy and the like, but in the actual size up of each proposal for change or promotion a few words between the foremen concerned, in the presence of a head foreman or assistant superintendent costs less and is better and fairer for all.

People are instinctively selfish of their own interests, and will fight to work in the light so that they may see things clearly and be sure they and their families who depend on them are not going backward in prosperity. My contacts with some of the leading men in this country, captains of industry in heart as well as mind, let me know they are working for exactly the same thing the worker wants—prosperity, self-respect and contentment. These men would have no trouble with any of the workers if they could work with them personally. But that is impossible and so they must trust to the personal touch of their lieutenants—not the

maudlin sentimental "welfare" touch of the opportunist—but an honest, sympathetic, brotherly relationship which every upstanding man appreciates and values highly.

The ablest workers in our industries are toiling day and night in the development of future plans to advance properly the status of their fellow-workers, and to divide fully and fairly the profitable results of their efforts between the three inseparable partners of all industry: money, brains and brawn.